

TRANSCRIPT

I Remember Jim Crow: African American Women Share Memories of the Era

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Event Description: "I Remember Jim Crow: African American Women Share Memories of the Era" was a public program of Buncombe County Public Libraries in partnership with the Stephens-Lee Alumni Association; the Center for Diversity Education at UNC Asheville; and Andrea Clarke, photographer. Recorded by Cassette Duplication Services, at West Asheville Branch Library, Asheville, North Carolina, March 18, 2007.

Recording contains reflections of four African American women (Lucille Flack Ray, 1924-2019; Ruby Rice Jones, 1926-2021; Elinor Brown Earle; Pat Brown Griffin, 1941-2021) covering how Jim Crow segregationist laws affected their own lives and those of their families in Asheville, North Carolina before Civil Rights legislation. Participants also shared how their personal experiences during these times of struggle helped shaped their character. Eight audience members are also recorded from the Q&A session, of which only one (Frieda Nash) is identified.

The program grew out of a Together We Read community reading of the novel "To Kill a Mockingbird" for The Big Read, an initiative of the National Endowment for the Arts in partnership with the Institute of Museum and Library Services and Arts Midwest, administered by Together We Read in Western North Carolina.

Moderator: And , Mrs. Ray, would you start?

Lucille Flack Ray: I'm a little shy.

(Laughter.)

LFR: But I don't mind. You know, I grew up and just as I was telling the ladies back there when we were talking, I really feel that I'm related to Jim because I grew up with him. And those of us that grew up from children here in the Asheville area, we know what segregation was all about. There, just as that sign back there, said "White only" for the restrooms, only way we could go to the restroom if we wanted to relieve ourselves was run to Eagle Street, or run back home.

We couldn't go into department stores. There was nothing we could do. We could not sit down at the counter, nor could we have a sandwich. We could stand at the end of the counter and get a sandwich. But our parents could work behind those counters. We had to pass the schools to get to the school that we could go to, but we couldn't go to the school that was near us. We could not ride the yellow school buses. They were for white only. We could not go to parks like there on French Broad, Aston Park, Montford Park.

I lived in that area and as children we would walk down Montford Avenue and just look over at the park and just wish that we could go over there and play. But we couldn't. Everything was taken away, was never given to us. I can't say taken away from us, but we could not do any of those things. And to walk from the Short Street, Montford area was where I grew up. We walked from Montford area to Stephens-Lee High School every day. Sometimes I'd get to school, I'd be almost frozen, but those yellow school buses were for white only.

Now, I'm sure we had some--and at that time, let me see. I think we were colored people then.

(Laughter.) But then I think we became Negroes. (Laughter.) Then we became Black people. And I think now, are we African Americans? (Laughter.)

Moderator(?): At one time it was Afro American and then it became African Americans

LFR: I'm a little confused as to really just who I am. But see, we've had so many names, but through it all we survived. And sometimes I have heard some of the whites say because most of the--I'm going to use the term the Black people--everybody was very religious and believed in God with all of our hearts.

Church was the biggest place that we had to go. I went to church so much and vowed when I grew up I'd never go again. (Laughter.) After I married and had children, I knew then I better get back in church, though. We were there for Sunday school, Baptist training union, Monday service, night service, prayer meeting, practice, choir practice. That was it for us. Going to church. And of course, we slipped and went to dances. But, you know, the good preachers didn't think that, you know, we were supposed to dance, but we did it anyway.

And, you know, I saw a picture in one of the papers, this YWCA was over there, just as you go through the tunnel, there was a wood building there. Mrs. Ruckin was the director there. That's where we would go for all the school dances or what have you. Course, everywhere we went, we walked because we could not afford to even pay bus fare. Nobody had cars during that time. So everywhere we went we walked. But through it all we survived. And we do have a story to tell.

Now my mother's parents, oh, my mother grew up in Black Mountain, just right across, you know, right up the road there. And my mother went to school. The school only went to the

seventh grade. I have a picture of it, it's a little one room shack. And all of the children went to that one room shack, regardless of their age or size. My mother went, and it only went to the seventh grade. My mother went three years because she loved school. So therefore, she went to the seventh grade, three, three times just to stay in school.

And I think she came out quite well because she was not illiterate. She did a very good job, but she did more domestic work and what have you, because back then that was just about all you could do. And if you worked for some of the good, good rich white folks, it was like you were rich yourself, or if you got a job in the department stores, oh, that was a big time job.

And the pay was so little. I remember my mother made her dollar a day, and she had to pay bus fare out of that dollar. It was so sad back during those times, but by the grace of God, we made it. And as I was telling someone the other day, I am so grateful that I was able to live to see--we had the heat our bath water in a tub. We had to make the fire, though, before we could heat the water. You had to have something to make the fire with before you could make the fire. Sometimes we didn't have it.

We were very poor people, because jobs were hard to get. And I don't mind saying this. My father was an alcoholic and he was a good person, but he wasn't, he just didn't do like he was supposed to do. So a lot of times, you know, we just didn't have. But through it all, we made it. But I'm grateful today that I was able to live to say, I like pushing a button and the lights come on. I like to pushing and the heat will go down or up. I like going for some hot water when I wash my--.

We had to heat water for everything, and I don't mind saying this, we got a good bath once a week. I'm serious. I'm just being honest about it. Because you didn't have time in the morning to make a fire and heat the water, get in the tub, so you washed up, but you sure didn't get no bath every day. So those are some of the things that I remember.

But segregation was something. And the people treated us so poorly. It was as though we were treated like nobody. But I guess it's kind of, if this is the way you grew up, but I was always rather... I don't know, I think I was a very belligerent child. I always wanted to know why. How come? And nobody wanted to tell me anything. And then I would seek, I was going to find out something one way or the other, and I got a lot of whippings, tell a little tale.

But it was hard. But I just and I still see a lot of Jim Crow even today. I see it done in a settled way. Asheville has grown by leaps and bounds, but basically we don't have anything. Blacks, now we can go, but we can go as long as we are small in numbers. You can live in this neighborhood, but don't put too many of us in there. These are things that we see as Black people, as long as there's a few of us and we mind. But I have never been a person to mind you. But you almost... My grandson, when he finished college--he's working now at the--not here, but you almost--you almost have to--you have to talk a certain way.

I'm going to say this and I'm not saying it to be facetious in any way. I've worked with whites. Their English was so terrible, but they could get the top jobs. It was, "your'n'ses" and "be's I done done." "Be's I done done"? Being that I have done, that was what. But we couldn't use words like, you know, like some of our youngsters, "Hey, what you doin'?" Hey, what's up, man?" You couldn't use that.

You either talked that, (singing) yee-oooooh, almost singing the words, but we did learn good control of the English language when we were in school. So these to me today, are some of the things that we need to talk about, bring out in the open. Because it's still not right. It's not right. But I can smile and laugh about it, but I can talk about it too. My time's up.

(Laughter & applause.)

Moderator: Ms. Jones?

Ruby Rice Jones: My name's Ruby Jones, and I lived during segregation and I'll endorse most of what she has said, Lucille has said. But I'll tell how it affected my family and me. And I might repeat the fact that when starting the school in early years, we were forced to walk to school because there were schools that we could go to in the neighborhood and around, there and near, where we couldn't go because of our color. And our parents, my parents in particular, were fortunate enough during that time to live in the neighborhood of College Street, and my years started that at Allen Home School, which was an old Black school, but we had white teachers and of course we didn't feel the effects like some.

And starting and over in that section, our neighbors, although they were white, they mixed very well. But they were forced to send us to a private school, because we couldn't go to the city schools, because they were so far. So after leaving that neighborhood for a while, then we had to walk from Magnolia over there, because we passed many schools that we could have gone to, but because of the fact of our color, we could not go.

So, and that made it very difficult for us. The walking and during weather. And back in that day, you know, the the children are so fortunate now. The schools are closed during bad weather, but

we went snow, rain, sleet. School didn't stop. You just went. And I think the time that dad had to shovel out cold 36 and at those period when Asheville was really cold and snowy, and to us to get out, but we had to go to school That's one thing that affected my family in the way of us having to pass up neighborhood schools in order to get an education.

And after before that, my grandfather passed at an early age. And we were living on College Street at that time. And I had a very wonderful uncle from Detroit, Michigan, who hadn't been down to see my grandfather in a while. And due to the brief illness and death, it was our pleasure to look forward to our uncle coming to Asheville.

And one of our cousins made the mistake of taking him on the bus. And he sat in front of the bus, which was a boo-boo. At that time, you were supposed to go to the back. And they let him ride for a while, and then they insisted that he move and go to the back of the bus. Having maybe a little temper and coming from the north, he resisted. And much to our surprise when he knew anything. the bus was pulling up to where they called the police. And at that time, which was a very hurtful thing to my family, they gave him a few hours to get out of Asheville. "Your daddy's funeral is tomorrow but you can not attend. You've got to be out of Asheville for sitting in front of this bus and refusing to move." So that affected our family very much. And he was an uncle that we hadn't seen in a long time. And we had to move. My family had to prepare to get him ready and get him out of Asheville because of the fact he sat in the front of the bus.

Also, when I finished school and went to take up cosmetology, there were schools around that I could have gone to, but they were for white only. Blacks could not attend. So my family was forced to send me to another town, to (LeMay?) College who would accept Blacks. After finishing and getting my certificates and getting my license, I had white friends that lived in the

neighborhood who wanted me to come on and share with them until I got established in business. And when I received my license, it said “colored shops only.” I could not work. I had to wait. So I went out and got other work in order to get my business going. And my dad built a business in the back yard and I helped get my business started there.

There were a number of times that we traveled with the church. And along the way we would stop at restaurants and places, said “We don't serve the N word.”

We stopped sometime to go to the restroom. Some would tell you they didn't serve so-and-so. We don't want Black, colored, or the N-word. And then some of them, when they saw you get out of the car, they would say, “You n--s, get out of this property, can't sell you nothing!” And we'd say, “We just wanna use the ba—” “We don't want you in the building!” Those kind of things are the things that I can remember so well that affected my family. And many, many trips was taken that we just really had a hard time with that.

But I'm glad amongst those that... Although segregation was prevalent during those days. But we did have some whites in our neighborhood who disregarded that in the way of treating us nice. And through it all we were able to receive the education our parents were able to afford and give us, and our health had held up, that we might walk to these places and try to abide within the law and do the thing that's right. That's the way segregation affected me. Thank you.

(Applause.)

Elinor Brown Earle: I think that when I was coming up...I'm a wee bit younger than y'all. And I think that I just accepted it as a way of life. You know, you knew when you went to school you

went with all blacks. You knew that when you went to the movies, you had to go upstairs in the balcony.

And we really thought that was the good seating in back. You knew that anything that you did, we had to do things a certain way. You knew that if you got on the bus to go to school, you had to sit on the back of the bus. And we just accepted that as a way of life. Which I think was a good thing to a certain extent—in this way, no, Mrs. Ray, in this way (laughter)—we was taught to respect our elders whether they were Black, white, pink blue, or what. We was always taught to be as clean as we could be. We was always taught to keep our hair and everything in certain ways. We was always taught to wear belts in our pants.

We were just taught different from the way the kids are taught now because we was kind of competing with the white kids. We was always taught that when they had that speech contest, our parents always told us that we had to do ten times better than what the white kids did.

I can remember when we were in the Christmas parade, we had the boots with the hose in the sole. Nobody knew that. because our boots was shined and white. When we came down Patton Avenue, they didn't know that we had holes in our boots, holes in our little panties that we had on, you know, the majorette suits, they didn't know all that. Because we were we were clean as pins, and we was always taught to look good. When we went on our little basketball trips, uniforms was starched and ironed to the tee.

When the glee club went to perform at different occasions, we had on our little white shirts that somebody, the teacher, probably, bought half of them for us. Back then, if you didn't have something, it wasn't like it is now. Your teacher would say, “Well, I'll get you a white, don't you

wear it.” She didn't pull you out like they do now and say, “You stand over here, you don't have a white shirt.” We gon see if we can get--. When you came in, you had a white shirt like everybody else. They would take us in the bathroom. They just did different from us. And that's why I say that it made us stronger.

It made us stronger, because that still carried over until now. We go somewhere--. Basically, when I'm like, I have to go to school with my after-school children. And they'll say, “Mrs. Earle, can you go to my problem with me tonight?” And I said, “Well, you should have told me earlier, because I'm looking like the bag lady now, but if I had known about it, I would've dressed,” you know, we just don't go out and do like people, you know, do now. It's just different.

Now, when I first really thought about segregation, I think it was in the sixties. Now, they did a lot to us. I can remember when we used to walk down Coxe Avenue, we's come from Stephens-Lee, from Stephens-Lee to up Eagle Street, go up Biltmore, and go to Kress's and try to get us a candy apple for \$0.10. And then we had to come down Coxe Avenue.

Every time we would get down there by Sears-Roebuck, that's where the Department of Social Services is now, the kids from Lee Edwards would come up with their eggs. They would egg us. And we, after they did that the first time, we were shocked. But we knew the next time we was gonna be ready for them.

So they would come in to egg us and we would beat them up to the square, because that's where they would get off the bus at. While it was big fight, we beat them, and come on down to Coxe Avenue again. And we used to go to the Y, that Y she was talking about on Friday nights, we used to go to the Y. And after the Y the boys used to put us in front of them that lived in our

community. They would put us in front of them and they would walk behind us. So every Friday night we had a fight because the kids that was in the skating ring on Biltmore, where the Orange Peel is [Skateland Rollerdom, 1950-1962]. They would come out and throw rocks and things at us. And so, they didn't know the boys was behind us. So we would say, "They threw rocks at us!" So the boys would go in the skating ring and drag them out and do what they had to do to them. And then we would come on down.

LFR: What'd they have to do, Elinor?

EBE: Beat them up! Do what you had to do--beat them up. When they call us the N-word, we called them the C word. You know what that is. The S-C, soda cracker, cracker, anything, you know, they called it, go back and forth with it. And sometimes we had to fight and sometimes we didn't have to fight.

But I never really... I think we just took it as a way of life. We were so proud of ourselves, just like Stephens-Lee. That's why we still holding on to Stephens-Lee. When we marched in the parade, we *marched*. We didn't have a bus to come by and pick us up and say, "We gonna take you tonight, we're going out to eat and we going on back to school."

We marched in the parade. When we left the parade, we went home in the cold. After the game we walked home. We did what we had to do. And it made us--all of us, after we got out of school, a lot of us didn't go off to college, but we *still* had jobs.

And the money that we made with our jobs, we bought our houses, our cars, and sent our children off to school to college, and did what we had to do. So I'm saying it made us, I think it kind of made us stronger. With the help of these ladies, you know, our teachers loved us.

And our teachers—see, this is what I don't understand, they keep saying that it's too many in the classroom, and it might be, but we used to have thirty in our classroom, and out of our classroom you might not have had but one that came out that couldn't read. And at the time we didn't know that something might have been mentally wrong with that person, you know.

But we all came out reading, we all came out making A's. Because we used to get our report card and we'd say, "What did you make? I made a A, I made a B." You know, we used to compare our report cards. We were good kids, good kids. And we still good adults. (Laughter & applause.)

Pat Brown Griffin: But I think about our parents and I think the strength of our parents just really caused us to be the kind of people we are today. Because I think about the demeaning and the degradation that our parents had to suffer through. I know my dad would work three or four jobs to take care of us, and when he would go to the job, these were like keeping people's yards clean, cleaning their house, whatever he had to do. And he would have to go from one job to another, you know, he worked this job a few hours, get a few pennies and go to the next one.

And the demeaning part of it is because, they were called by their first names, but they had to call their employers, Mister or Miss. They had to call the children Miss or Mister. You couldn't call the children by their first names either because you had to give the whites respect. But our parents didn't get that respect.

I remember when, my dad always liked to travel, so he always had a car. But he was such a proud man, I mean, we were hungry A lot of times you had to pack your own food. We packed fried chicken. Pound cake. Because you had to eat, you couldn't stop at a restaurant. And if you stopped at a restaurant, you had to go to the front and ask for it. You couldn't sit there and eat it.

You had to take it out, back to the car. If you had to go to the bathroom while you are on the road, I mean, they had to stop the car, you'd go out into the bushes somewhere.

Remember that? Go out into the bushes and use the bathroom. And I mean, you were passing by all these places where you could have gone in and go to the bathroom. So those are the things that were really demeaning, I feel, to to our parents. But they persevered, you know.

And somebody asked me, what did your parents sit down and read to you a lot? No, they didn't sit down and read to us like we do to our children today. But somehow we learned to read. I mean, most of us went to school knowing how to read, didn't we? We knew how to read, and we knew how to read well when we went to school.

I think about when I was at Stephens-Lee, when we all went to Stephens-Lee, we had secondhand books. Our books came from the white schools. So when we got them, they were already worn. You know, they might have a page torn out of them. In the chemistry labs, we didn't have all the equipment that we needed for chemistry to be taught to us. We might have had litmus paper, box of brownies, that's about all we had for them to use in the chemistry labs.

But our teachers taught us, and if you all remember, just about every one of our teachers and Stephens-Lee had a master's degree. They went off, and I think they instilled in us, because I don't care how mentally challenged you were in those days, I think we all thought we were going off to school. We were excited about finishing school and going off to college, and many of us did, you know.

I also think about when when Ella talked about the pride we had in school, I think? When we went to elementary school, we were all expected to take part in a big end of the year play. And I

mean, we all had to be great artists, you know, we had to really nerd out part and stand up there proudly and recite it. And where we got to Stephens-Lee, we had teachers who who are very articulate, so they expected us to be that way too, you know, our English teachers.

Oh, gosh. I mean, we were learning so many poems! And you had to learn them by memory and stand there and recite them. And these are things we don't do in school today. Our kids are sort of inhibited because we don't expect these kind of things out of them. You know, you ask the child to stand and recite something now, and they sort of withdraw, you know, they can't do it. They can't stand in front of a crowd and recite anything.

I remember when I first started teaching in the early seventies, and they had just integrated the schools in 1969. They integrated them in December. So the year that I went into the school system was in '70 and the sad part about it is that the schools in the Black communities were turned into community centers after a while, and we were sent off to white schools.

And so when I taught I was looking at audiovisual equipment that had Livingston Street Elementary School on it, it might have had Shiloh Elementary School. So all the equipment was taken out of the Black schools and put into the white schools. And you had a few Black teachers who were who were teaching there. You know, you had very few of very few Black teachers who were teaching in schools at that time. They spread us out some.

And I want to tell this. Because when I left Asheville to go to school, I went to Tuscaloosa, Alabama, and not really knowing that I was going into a situation that was worse than what I was leaving. Because I remember the first time I was on the bus in the back of the bus, and you had to go to the back. And when the bus would stop at the bus stations, you know, for you to change,

you couldn't go into the restaurants there in the bus station. You might could go into the side somewhere. There was a little area where you would go into the side and you'd order your food, but you had to take it back to the bus and eat it. You could not sit in that in that cafeteria or whatever in the bus station to eat.

And of course, there were colored bathrooms. They would have colored fountains. You had to go to the colored fountain, the colored bathroom. And I don't care how bad you had to go, if somebody was in the colored bathroom, you just had to wait. Because you better not go in there with the sign that said white.

So when I first got into Tuscaloosa that first year, that was a big sign that said, "The Home of the KKK." I mean, I thought, "Where am I? What am I doing?" I'm going down here by myself, so far away from Asheville. And so when I got on the campus, we passed by this university, the University of Alabama.

And I think some months before that Autherine Lucy had tried to integrate. She was the first one to go in to try to integrate the University of Alabama [in 1956]. And the school I was going to was historic because they had hid her up on the campus. The KKK were after her, and they had hid her up on the campus in the library of the school that I was going to attend. And so I thought that was just so historic, that I was going to a school like that.

But we could not go into town by ourselves. You had to go in groups. Because when we would travel into town, the white kids would make these smoke bombs I think, they would make them and they stick all this stuff down into a pop bottle. And they would throw them out the windows

at us and they make this loud noise. And then they would laugh because of course it scared us half to death.

And so when we would get in town, if we could catch the bus back, the bus driver, If you were standing where the bus stops, there were no Black bus drivers at that time. So you're standing here waiting on the bus. And if he sees you're Black, I mean, he would come so close to you, you would have to jump back. But nobody cared. Nothing was said, you know.

It was just that we had a good fight from that experience. So we always traveled in large groups when we went to town. I remember once they told us that the KKK were going to ride up on our campus, and we had to go in. We were all calling home, you know, scared.

And so we had to go into our dorms, and we had to close the blinds, and we had cut off the lights and we had to be very still, very quiet. Because they were going to ride to campus that day. So nobody could be seen because she didn't know what was going to happen.

But I stayed there for three years and then came back home and finished school. But the whole time I was there, I mean, you're talking about an awakening as far as segregation. That was an awakening for me, because, oh, it was worse. It was worse then. I even saw the KKK circle around in groups and burn crosses and things, you know. So that was really an experience for me outside of Asheville. But still, Jim Crow.

EBE: But she still made it.

PBG: Yes, I did.

(Applause.)

LFR: Could I add something to what Pat was saying? And do you know, even when... It could be Black or white, when the kids were younger, the Blacks were always wrong. Nobody seemed to want to defend or think, okay, whatever they called us, you know, just explained all those names we had. But whatever, it was almost like you couldn't defend yourself.

We had, this was before y'all's time, it was one of the Chavez boys. He was shining shoes downtown there on College Street. And you know how you get up on these things and shine it? He was shining this white girl's shoes, and she said he winked at her. Do you know, he had to go to prison. He could not defend himself.

And then there was another incident. One of my classmates, he and this white girl were really dating. But when they were caught, she denied it. He had to go to prison. Regardless of what, it was almost like we couldn't win. But just like Pat said, those that made it through, I'm grateful to God because it was not easy during those days.

We were not cowards, and we were not little docile people. But we knew that if whatever you said or did, it was almost held against you. And I'm going to say this, and it might have been before your times because you know, y'all are younger than my children. But some of the teachers even made segregation.

A lot of them, they catered to the real light, or the prominent families in the schools. If you were real dark, or you weren't real smart, you were left out of a lot of things. And just as I was telling the ladies back there earlier, when I was in high school, we didn't do what you would call the good old Negro spirituals and the good old gospel singing.

I was telling them, sitting up there and didn't none of us have it like, (singing) "I Dream of Jeannie with the light brown hair." That's the kind of songs we learned! (Laughter.) And then I was sitting up there and thinking...but that was during that time. Now see, I'm talking about back during the late thirties and early forties, and it was a big difference back then.

But it was we even though as though some of the teachers, they were programmed as to, *this is what you do*. I was in DC at the time when Jesse Jackson and all of them, "Black is beautiful" and "I'm Black and I'm proud." It was one of the most beautiful things in the world, because we had some jet black girls with kinky hair, and they were stepping tall and proud.

And this was the beginning of people feeling good about themselves, regardless of the color. And then it began to catch on all over the United States. And when, you know, when you put people down, it's hard to stand up and fight. And then if you fight, you get put in jail or you get beat. And I would parent some of them, I knew mine were, they were a little afraid.

One thing I hated to see was a black man whipped down so badly that each time a white man would come around he'd pull his cap back and scratch his head. You know, because they were so accustomed to taking their caps off for the white people. They didn't take them off for us. And I used to stand and wonder why. Thanks.

(Laughter & applause.)

EBE: Guess that is one of the reasons why, when the little 33 kids that we have in our after school program... I actually think it's planned, to beat you down so that you won't feel good about yourselves. Because they still say terrible things to kids now. Because one little boy, when

I first started the Youthful HAND [Housing Against Narcotics & Drugs] program, he was in first grade. He had a little cleft lip. You know what I'm talking about?

He came to me, he said, "Mrs. Earle, my teacher told me I was dumb, and I'd never learn how to read and learn my ABCs." And I said, "What teacher told you that?" And he said, "Math teacher." So I said, "Okay." I say, "Come come up here and sit on my lap." So he did, and I went over his ABCs, like A-B-C tonight, and next go to the next. So we saw that boy. He stayed in my program for about three years.

Then his mom moved out here in West Asheville. We saw that boy at the Martin Luther King breakfast and he's this tall now. And he said, "Mrs. Earle!" and he grabbed me and hugged me. And he is that Erwin School, is he a senior? (mm-hmm) on the A-B honor roll. But he's the child that "would never make anything out of themselves."

They still--it's just that little bitty thing, like, I can remember who my daughter was in--she went, my children went to Carolina Day for a while. And you know how I was saying, we was taught all if you got on tennis shoes, your tennis shoes was white. If you got on socks, white socks, your socks was white. So when I sent my children to Carolina Day, you know, I always said they're going to look good if nothing else. And I had parents out there asking me, "How you keep her tennis shoes so white? How do you keep her—" I said, "Y'all the one got the money!"

(Laughter.)

Y'all ought to know what to do to keep that. You know, "Where you get your little girls dresses from, where you do this and that?" And I want to say, what in the world is going on? You got the money where you can buy dresses and things from anywhere.

But I always told my kids, I say, “Look, the teachers...” I went to the teachers and say, “You dealing with little Black kids,” I say, “and whenever somebody come to take a picture, use this comb and use this brush. You gonna put them in the paper, you go in, you brush the hair. Don't let it be standing all over there.” Because that's what they want to see. They want to see that.

PBG: But I remember along the lines you're talking about... I remember my dad, he was a disabled veteran. And so at that time they would issue watches, cars. So my dad, one of the first better cars that he had was issued from the government, but he could not take that car. My brother would drive him and he could not drive that car to his work because if he drove it to the white people's house where he worked, they would think he didn't need that job, because he had money, you know. So you had to keep things from them because, you know, they would think you had money, you didn't need the job or, you know, that you wouldn't be treated as well as they thought they were treating you.

EBE: And right today, they say little things to you that... We're grown now, we know what's going on, So we kind of can retaliate. I had a maid service. And I had this little lady who used to always tell me, “Can you move that dresser over there?” You know, I said, “That's the job for your husband to do, or you get the renter people or somebody to move it, you know. You can't move it, you're a lady; I'm a lady, I can't move it.

You know, they feel like that we can just do, you know, do anything. And can talk to you like they—now, not everybody now. Can't put them all in the same bag. But you got some that want to talk to you. Not like because we've always been taught to say miss, mister, it's just something that's basely in you. It's hard for me to come out sometime and say, “Debbie,” you know? I'll say

Miss Miles, because that's the way we was taught, you know, even though she's younger than me. But I had this one lady--and I'm just telling all my--cut me off. Get ready to cut me off.

(Laughter.)

EBE: But I have to tell you this, she--. Now listen at this. She at Christmas time, you know how they give you the bonus at Christmas time. And all my customers, they are really, was really good to me. So it just so happened that my son was in school in Mississippi, which is an hour behind us. I think it's an hour behind us.

So he called and said, "Mom," he said, "I'm having a little problem in the finance department." So I said, "Okay." I said, "I'll be here tomorrow. It's 9:00 your time, 10:00 my time. I will stay here until that time." So I can get it straightened out. Well, I called the little lady to tell her that I wouldn't get in until a little later.

So when I got there, it was late. It was about 10:30 when I got there because I had to take care of my son's business. So when I got there, she said--I say, (sing-song voice) "Good morning, Miss Barbara." She said, (gruffly) "Good morning." I said, "Oh Lord, what's happening."

(Laughter.)

So I went on, I start doing my work. So she says, "Elinor," she said, "You're going to have to start putting me first."

(Laughter.)

And I said, "I called you and told you that I would be a little late. I didn't have to do that, but I did. I called you, because that's the right thing to do. I called you and told you that I was going to be a little late. I had to take care of some business with my son." She says, "You not going to get any more money from me," talking about the bonus and, you know...temperature rising.

(Laughter.)

So I'm dusting and going on. So I said, "Wait a minute." I said, "Now you gave me that bonus because I did good for you. Or you wouldn't have given me that bonus. She kept talking and talking and talking. And so I said, "Okay, Elinor, what you going to do?

So I said, "Pat!" I said, "Come in here for a moment, please." She came in. I said, "Let me tell you something." I said, "You gave me that bonus because I did good. I cleaned your house the way you wanted it to be clean." I said, "Now you don't treat me like I'm no little puppy. Like when the puppy say, when you say jump over the fence, and the puppy jump over the fence, you say, 'Good dog.'" I said, "Don't work like that with me." I say, "I tell you what, you take this money because I'm gone."

(Laughter.)

And I started crying, 'cause, you know, I had been with her for about two years or maybe more. And I started crying, and I went down the driveway, and I came back up, and the doctor came down and said, "Don't pay any attention, she's some..."

But I say, "She's not going to talk to me like that." So to make a long story short, I left. She wrote me, she called me. She did everything she could do. But you don't talk to people like that. I

respect you as long as you respect me. When you try to get stepping on my toes, I'm one to stepping back.

And I say that to say that, they still have that little bit like, if you were in...well, they just still have that little bit of bossiness. I guess it was just, I don't guess you can be mad at them because they was taught like that. You know, they was taught.

In cheerleading, I remember this lady saying, "Shanetta is"--that's my daughter--"she's threatening my daughter. She told a coach that." And I say, "Well, what did she do to her?" And what she did? Shanetta said, "We're going to do it, and we're going to do it right, and you're going to do it right." But she could say that to Shanetta, but she didn't want Shanetta to say that to her. And I've always told Shanetta, "Step up and speak up." And that's what you have to do, you know. And if you can't handle it? Oh, mother dearest.

(Laughter.)

LFR: But you know, just one more thing I would like to say. I don't think any of you in here would do this, because I'll let you look like good people. You know, a lot of our educated young people are put behind whites that didn't finish high school. Get on jobs, they'll push you back in a minute--*if* you let 'em. We have had this to happen so much. I've even worked on jobs when I was much younger. But it's hard for anybody to think that a Black person can supervise a () But you can work with, or you can work under, but don't work above.

Now it's changing. And the reason why it's changing, because we have some strong Black people out here today. And we have some strong, good white people. And I would put it like this. I don't look at people by color. I look at character. Because I have Black people I don't want to be

around, and I have white people I don't want to be around, but it's the character. What do you have in common? What do you have to give to the world? What good, what can you, how can you make things better? This is what it's all about. It's not about I'm white, and you Black, or I'm Black and you white. So if we could just look at it this way and think of character instead of color, we could make a lot of change in this big, beautiful world.

(Applause.)

Moderator(s): We can take a couple of questions. One or two questions? Or if anyone has a comment, a testimony of your own about what that era was like.

Audience member 1: Well, I have a question. I want to know something about these underground bathrooms, or tunnels...?

EBE: I don't remember that one. But I can remember the James Key Hotel.

LFR: I remember that one!

EBE: I don't remember that one.

Audience member 2: Those were right there on Pack Square. Where the fountain is.

LFR: Right on Pack Square. They were restrooms downstairs. There were restrooms, but they were for white only. I never went down there but I could peep down the steps.

Audience member 2: One thing, when I first moved to Asheville, I haven't been here that long, so only about 1973, something like that, I noticed those there because they had an iron gate across, and they closed them. And I asked, what in the world? I could use that thing, right now.

(Laughter.) And it was explained to me they closed them because there were only two. There was a white women bathroom and a white men bathroom, and there was nothing for the Blacks, and so they just closed them, rather than open them up.

LFR: That's right. When integration started they closed up a lot of things completely.

Audience member 2: And another strange thing, you mentioned that the Sears building, it was closed as Sears, but one of the first jobs I got was to measure that building and make a floor plan of it, and draw where all the escalators and columns were. And I was looking around, and on each floor there were *four* bathrooms. And extra water fountains, and I was just drawing this...they put all these, so many bathrooms, just right in a row, in the same place. And you know, then underneath some wallpaper I could kind of peel up and find little signs, and this was "white," and "colored," "white ladies," "colored ladies." But it's crazy to think that everybody—like, I grew up with this as a child, and you know, through a child's eyes, you sort of accept what's around you, you don't realize it's insane. You're trained to do these things that make no sense. And you accept them as normal. You know, it's amazing. I rode those buses that had a line, and you were supposed to sit up front. Supposedly, for some reason, those seats in the front were supposed to be better than the seats in the back. And then one day that sign in the front, little front sign said, "White passengers sit in the front, colored passengers sit in the rear," one day there was a little bumper sticker over it that said, "Passengers may pick the seats of their choice." And it was kind of nervous for a few days where people were jumping around and trying out the seats that they'd never been allowed to sit on. (Laughter.) And then people discovered, you know, it didn't make any difference. And it's kind of like finding out, we thought that was real important. But it was just crazy. It was nonsense.

LFR: You know, we appreciate that. One thing I wanted to ask, with some of the whites, what did Jim Crow mean to you? Now we lived through it. Did the ones of you that lived through it, is anybody here?

Audience member 2: Well, as a child, I was there, you know, just noticing these things. Like the household help that my mother hired. And just like you were saying, you know, I knew these women by names like Freddie and Catherine. I didn't have any idea what their last name was.

LFR: But did anybody--tell me, just what Jim Crow meant to--what we went through, see, we went through being *down*. And while you being the ones that were kind of *up*.

Audience member 3: I didn't--I grew up, I lived in Chicago and then I lived in Spain, actually. But what has what is really struck me today here is that, as crazy as this all sounds to me as something in the past, it was just as crazy to you. I have a niece who is about as dark as any of the one of you, and she's a very privileged child. She lives in DC, and I don't think she even knows much about what being Black is too well. Well, but what I've seen today is that you may have accepted it, knowing not to fight it, but it was just as crazy to you as it sounds to me hearing about it. I haven't experienced it, and it just sounds crazy. But it must have been, growing up thinking that everything was crazy around you.

LFR: They put our people in jail for the least little thing. One man was trying to apply for some job up at City Hall. They beat him to pulp up on the elevator and then put him out. Wasn't a thing anybody could do about it, because he was up in City Hall. These are things. That's why nobody could fight.

Audience member 4: I found it very puzzling. I was also, I was ten in 1964. That's when, when you'd ask, it was all just puzzling to me as the white—I just thought it meant, this is how sort of distorted, I just thought it meant I couldn't drink out of that thing, you know. And I didn't dare drink out of the colored fountain, because I didn't know what would happen to me. Which was nothing, to me. But it was all very puzzling. And I remember riding in the car to go to Morrison's Cafeteria with my grandmother. And it was on the radio and the news about the passing of the--it was a shock to my grandparents. It was interesting. I mean, it was it was puzzling. That's what I remember as a child. It didn't make sense.

Moderator(?): Did you ever ask your parents about things, to explain things? And what did they say?

Audience member 4: Well, not—well, they um. I can't remember specifically asking. I just remember attitudes and stuff, being part, you know. That my--

Moderator(?): How would you describe those attitudes?

Audience member 4: They were not positive. They were not—I can say, my sister and I were talking about this recently. My grandfather, I never saw. He worked for the railroad, and so he had Black people working for him. And I can say that I never saw him, in a public way, treat anybody with disrespect. So my sister countered that, she said, “But you know, I heard him say say one time that he had never actually had a conversation with any of the people, a regular, normal conversation with the people that he had worked with.” Even though he did not in a surface way, he didn't, he wasn't--that I ever witnessed, he wasn't mean or anything. But he also

didn't give the respect of treating them [his Black employees] as a full person to have a conversation, you know, ask about your family, ask about your--. So it's more just, you know...

(Cross-talk)

Audience member 5: I grew up in Brooklyn, New York in the fifties, went to school in New York. Maybe I don't look that old, but I am. (Laughter.) But my parents were immigrants, so there's a slightly different dynamic going on there. And first, second, third grade, I went to public school, and I don't remember--it was all mixed at that time. So this would have been in 1959, 1960. So it was very mixed and my group of playmates were very mixed also. Had many young Black boys I was friends with. And I don't recall looking at color until my parents pointed it out to me. Saying, "You can't play with that Black boy." And that was kind of shocking to me at that time when I was six, seven years old. I couldn't understand what was going on. He's like one of my best friends. And I just have to remember, we lived in an apartment building on the fifth floor. And I was walking down, I had just bought some Bazooka Joe bubble gum, with a little comic in it, and I had an arm around my little friend. And we were reading the comic, and my mom saw us and yelled from the window to, you know, basically for me to leave him and come upstairs. And she told me, "You can't do that." And yet, in the schools we were totally mixed and integrated. So I don't know. And that's why when you were asking, what do I remember about Jim Crow. I don't know if it was--I'm not saying there wasn't a racial prejudice in the North or the Northeast, but I certainly wasn't aware of it to the extent that it exists in the South. Which later on I moved to South Carolina and became more aware of it. In the North it existed, but possibly in a different way. It was a different thing.

RRJ: It was different.

EBE: But it's been taught all over the world.

Audience member 5: So you know, we talk about Hispanics and Black. Everything was very mixed, but people didn't mix, which was kind of odd. You know, you might live next door to Italians or Irish, but you didn't mix with them because we were Russians. We hung out with other Russians. Or Ukrainians and Polish people, so.

LFR: You know, one thing. Both of my grandfathers were products of white fathers. My great grandmother was a Cherokee Indian. My great grandfather was white on the Flack side. On the Step side, which was my mother's people, the father was white and the mother was Black. And I'm so mixed up sometimes I wonder who am I? (Laughter.) But of course I'm Black! And I'm proud of it. But when you start going down--. This lady said, once I was taking care of her, she says, "Lucille, I just believe in the races being pure." (Laughter.) Imma tell you what I told her. "If it had not been for your forefathers, it would have been pure. Had they left our grandmothers alone." Right?

(Laughter & applause.)

Frieda Nash: My name is Frieda Nash, and I grew up in Asheville and have lived here for 30 years. This is such a heartwarming situation here. Yet I hope that we can like, ripples of this dream, ripple it out to the rest of Asheville. The Martin Luther King breakfasts, Dr. Leary, Dr. Joy Leary from Washington State University out there was the speaker. And people bought her book, and unfortunately I finally got one and read it. Because of how she highlights a lot of this information, positive and negative and in between, the past, present, ND what we're going to do in the future. Well she has some good questions. I would like to share with you that she is

coming back by popular demand. She's being endorsed and brought back by the Martin Luther King group. And on March the 27th, which is on a Tuesday at the MAHEC Building, at 5:30, she's going to be signing her book. And please, if you're interested in this topic in any way, shape, or form, read the book. Because it's a culminating--I started at 25 years old, I'm 61 now, and I started educating myself about who I am. And she comes from good reference material. Her work is not play. And then she's going to have a workshop starting at 6:00, and the workshop costs \$35. It's a good investment for \$35, for yourself and for the children, for your friends, and the total community. Because I'm beginning to see, and my heart feels, that we are the seeds of change. (Applause.)

And the thing is, we don't know how long we have on this earth. And humanity is evolving. And we can either be a part of God's plan, or we can sit on the lawn and just let it pass on by. But it's going to move on. And humanity is going to become united. Because we are the seeds of the same stock. And I want to share with you a song. It's just one verse, please, and it does pertain to you. And at the end of the song is the word "Bahá'u'lláh," which means the glory of God in Arabic. I sang this on the San Antonio radio, to a Buddhist monk at the Atlanta airport, on the bus system here. I sing it to any humans who will listen to me, and I'd like to share it with you.

(singing) When I look into your eyes, I see my mother. When I look into your eyes, I see my father. When I look into your eyes, I see my sisters. When I look into your eyes, I see my brothers. When I look into your eyes, I see humanity. But most of all, when I look into your eyes, I see Bahá'u'lláh.

And that's what it's all about.

(Applause.)

EBE: That's right.

LFR: That was beautiful.

RRJ: Right to the point. Mm-hmm.

Audience member 6: I remember Stephens-Lee, but I went to Charlotte. I graduated from West Charlotte. They used to come beat us up too. (Laughter.) So we had to beat them up too. But I'm one of those Baby Boomers, '60 radical kids. But I remember in the fifties we only got new shoes Easter. And I remember my parents would have us put our foot on paper bag and mark the size of our feet. I never understood why they did that. And then they would come home with new shoes. And I found out because Black kids could not go to the store to try on shoes. The parent had to bring the paper and let them set the shoe on it to pick up the size of the shoe. I'm a '60s kid, but that was in the fifties. That's how it was. My father, I think he was the first hippie-hippie, because he bought, purchased a truck, and it was about six of us kids, and he put a bench on each side in the back, and a little sleeping cot in the middle, and a pee-pot in it. You know, we went to go visit our relatives out of town, we didn't need to go to no hotel to go to sleep. We slept in the car. You had to pee, or whatever you had to do, you had to slow down real slow... (Laughter.) Went out the window, keep going. So you know, I thought that was real modernist of my father, but he always told us--I asked the question, why do Indians and Mexicans and the Chinese go to the white school, but we don't? But my strong, Black father said, "Because they're scared of us. Your grand-daddy stole his education, because they wouldn't give it to us, because they knew if we got a little bit, we'd be much smarter." And Joe Louis was a hero, you know what I mean? So

our Black parents taught us Black pride. But the worst you could give back in the '50s is to say, "My Black friend, or Black—" Oh, you couldn't say that, you say "colored"! You couldn't say that! But we, James Brown kids, and Martin Luther King kids, we'd say, we're Black and proud. Martin Luther—Charlotte had the largest graduation in 1963, because all the Blacks high school graduated at the same time. Because all the police officers in Charlotte went to their graduation, because Martin Luther King spoke there. To our young people. Really, [inaudible] (Laughter.) But, you know, to this day, I know, he sacrificed his life to come to Charlotte, North Carolina, to speak to all our young people. So that's why if you wonder why people, the Baby Boomers, a little bit, are radical, because we were taught Black pride from our parents. We are so powerful that the white people scared us. So run and get it! (Laughter.) The kinkier your hair, the stronger! White people got their thin hair and they can't do much with it. We can curl it, we can straighten it, we can do anything we want to. And we don't ever wrinkle. (Laughter.) Because our skin is stronger than theirs. They get out there, they get skin cancer, anything else. There's nothing wrong with our skin color 'cause we're stronger. And from strong people that struggled. So that's what I got out of, you know, so sometimes people don't know where I'm coming from. Don't know where you all are coming from, but we got that Black pride in us. And still from that person who couldn't look up to a white woman, because he knew he had to live another day to raise his children.

(Applause.)

Audience member 7: I'm very young. I'm a lot younger, I'm more like your grandchildren's age. But just listening to everything that you guys went through during that time period. It's like you sit there and you think about, have I ever experienced anything? And, you know, I never

experienced experience anything on that level. When I was maybe in second grade, my parents, my grandparents and my mother decided to send us to private school. And that was the first time I had ever been called the N-word, never heard it. And it was a predominantly white school, and a lot of us were going there because they come to our church. And you know, they were asking for our parents to send their children there because they didn't have a diverse popular, popularity in the schools, so it was predominantly white. And in this one particular year it was maybe, I would say about ten of us. It was a very small school. So when we got there, we were not welcomed with open arms. And the teachers tried their best to try to keep peace. But it was fights every day. We had racial slurs every day. I endured it for three years until I finally told my mother, I said, "If you don't take me out, I'm going to flunk. I just, I can't do it." And that's even just a small pitch. If I had to go through what my grandparents and even my mother had to endure... It just boggles my mind to see how, just the depth of the hatred that our people have suffered. That I can look at my parents, and my grandparents, and my great great grandparents, and see how strong they are, and admire that. And try to fight my own way toward that. You know? So it's just—I don't even know what to say, you know, this is awesome.

PBG: Debbie, I have one more thing to say. The man here talked about his family coming over as immigrants. And I want to say this because I was reading this book, it's been quite a while ago, and this Black man's name was Abu, I can't remember the name of the book. But he talked about Blacks coming over. We didn't come over as immigrants. We were brought here as property. And so we were brought here. When you have immigrants coming over, they come over with a semi-permanent state. They know they're coming over and they're going to do this and that, and then they're going to move ahead. They're going to own businesses. They're going to move ahead, become great leaders, whatever. But when Blacks came over here, you

come as property. You come with a permanent state of mind that this is where you are. This is where you gonna be, because as the lady who was at the breakfast said, we've been told who we were for so long. Until we have functioned under somebody else's belief of who we are. It seems like we can't go out and borrow money from banks to get businesses. But you watch all the immigrants who come over, and in no time they have established businesses, and what have you. And I just want to throw that out, because that is stuck in my mind, that we have a different set of mind, Blacks do, I think, and we don't realize.

Moderator: Thank you so much, ladies.

(Applause.)

END OF RECORDING.